

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSJ #0040/01 0261508
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 261508Z JAN 09
FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0436
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SAN JOSE 000040

SIPDIS, SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CEN, WHA/PPC SMiller, G/TIP BFleck.

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PHUM KTIP CS

SUBJECT: COSTA RICA - NOMINATION FOR 2009 TIP HERO

REF: SECSTATE 132759

¶1. (U) Embassy San Jose is pleased to nominate Mariliana Morales Berros, founder and Executive Director of the Rahab Foundation (Fundacion Rahab) as a 2009 TIP Hero, per reftel.

NOMINEE DATA

¶2. (U) Nominee: Mariliana Morales Berros.

¶3. (U) Title and Institution: Founder and Executive Director of the Rahab Foundation (Fundacion Rahab).

¶4. (SBU) Date of Birth: December 25, 1956.

¶5. (SBU) Contact Information: Phone: (506)2257-7785 or (506)2222-1054; mobile (506) 8858-0589; personal email - mariliana777@hotmail.com.

¶6. (SBU) Passport Number and Citizenship: 8.011.896-1, Chile.

¶7. (SBU) Personal Background: Mariliana Morales was born in the northern Chilean Atacama desert. She is married to Chilean Tomas Goi Cortes, and they have three children. While she lived in Chile, her boyfriend at the time (now her husband) became a political prisoner at age 16. When he was freed from prison, the two married and left Chile for Costa Rica in search of a better life. They arrived in February 1982. Mariliana studied Sociology and received her masters degree in Social Work from the University of Costa Rica.

JUSTIFICATION

¶8. (U) Since 1997, Morales has steadfastly, and at times under direct personal threat, built and maintained a faith-based framework to help victims of commercial sexual exploitation and their children. Her efforts have helped train and sensitize thousands of judicial and law enforcement personnel to trafficking and sexual exploitation issues, and more importantly, provided direct assistance to hundreds of women and their families in San Jose, Jaco and Limon, Costa Rica. Her Rahab Foundation is the leading NGO working with international organizations, local embassies and the GOCR to stop commercial sexual exploitation and related trafficking in persons in Costa Rica. Morales has made an enormous, positive impact on the way the GOCR deals with these issues, and on the victims themselves.

BACKGROUND

¶9. (U) After what Morales describes as an existential crisis that led to her belief in God, she prayed to be shown a way in which she

could serve. In answer, she received a vision of the word "prostitution" across the sky and knew she was meant to help empower women who wanted to leave prostitution. On November 12, 1997, she created the Rahab Foundation (Fundacion Rahab) by helping one woman.

Within a month, 30 victims of commercial sexual exploitation and their children had sought her help. To accomplish its mission, the Rahab Foundation relies on Morales, two to three psychologists/social workers, and volunteers. In fact, Rahab and Morales have become so well known for their dedicated work that international interns and volunteers, as well as Costa Ricans, have been assisting the Foundation.

¶10. (U) With the creation of the Rahab Foundation, Morales became a pioneer in Costa Rica in assistance to victims of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking. Currently, Rahab is also helping male victims of commercial sexual exploitation, including transvestites. Morales' efforts have helped these victims find a new life with their families.

¶11. (U) Morales' task has not been easy. She has struggled every step of the way to find funding to keep the program going, often operating only on faith that resources would appear. For example, even when she could not pay salaries, she moved ahead with a new \$100,000 building project to provide facilities for vocational training, a daycare, and space where the program beneficiaries would be able to run micro businesses, such as a hair salon. She, her staff, and their families have been threatened and/or attacked for trying to help women and children escape from their exploiters.

¶12. (U) Mariliana and her family often receive direct threats by telephone at home. Also, while operating an anti-trafficking project funded by the International Labor Organization in Limon (see para 15), one of the Foundation's staff psychologists was threatened in order to stop her from rescuing child victims of sexual exploitation. When the staffer did not back down, her two younger sisters were successively kidnapped and raped. Although that psychologist ultimately resigned, threats of this nature have not deterred Mariliana and others in the Foundation from continuing their work.

THE FOUNDATION

¶13. (U) Rahab assists victims through a socio-educational program that provides spiritual attention, education, nutrition, psychological assistance and vocational training to the victims. Morales created a job pool by networking with private companies, thereby providing opportunities for reintegration and medical/legal attention. (Social medical benefits are coordinated through workplaces in Costa Rica). Rahab provides educational scholarships, and victims can complete their primary school education at Rahab's facility.

¶14. (U) Since its creation, Rahab has helped more than 600 families, usually headed by a single mother, with an average of five children each (for a total of 3000 persons served) in the San Jose area alone, and many more outside of San Jose. The organization has given 11 houses to victims through a partnership with the Costa Rican government, and it hopes to provide 44 more residences in the coming months - all free to the recipients.

NATIONAL IMPACT

¶15. (U) Rahab developed two very important projects in rural areas with USG funding - one in Limon and one in Jaco. Drugs, prostitution and trafficking in persons are common crimes in these two areas. In 2003, Mariliana instituted a pioneer two-year project in the port city of Limon called "Prevention, Protection and Direct Assistance to Child Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation." The project, which served as a model for Central America, Panama and the Dominican Republic, directly served 464 minors and their families; it reached 3000 more indirectly.

¶16. (U) In addition, Rahab trained government institutions that worked with children such as: the Child Welfare Agency (Patronato

Nacional de la Infancia, in Spanish), the Fuerza Pública (national police), the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the federal investigative police, indigenous communities, tourism companies, judges and prosecutors, among others, on the topic of child sexual exploitation. The project was funded by the U.S. Department of Labor; management support for the grant was provided by the International Labor Organization (ILO).

¶17. (U) From 2006 to 2008, Morales and Rahab ran a program called "Prevention, Protection and Assistance to Victims and Potential Victims of Trafficking in Persons in the Central Pacific Region" in the seedy tourist area in and around the resort town of Jaco. The program was funded by State's G/TIP with management support from the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This was a true pioneer project in the country to assist both national and foreign victims of labor and sexual exploitation.

¶18. (U) The project directly served 347 victims and their families, and reached 5000 people in the community. As in the Limon project, Morales implemented a "train the trainer approach" to teach the same government institutions, local police and mayors, tourism companies and minors about trafficking in persons, for a total of 5191 trained. During the Jaco project, Rahab filed several official complaints against traffickers and sexual exploiters, leading to threats and attacks against Morales and her staff.

REGIONAL EFFORTS

¶19. (U) Since 2006, Morales has served as coordinator of the Latin American and Caribbean International Christian Alliance on Prostitution. In that capacity, Morales is organizing a conference for March 2009 to train 150 organizational leaders and individuals to work in the "restoration" of victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

RECOGNITION

¶20. (U) For her outstanding work, Morales received the 1999 Gandhi Foundation and Martin Luther King Foundation "Builder of Non-Violence" award, and she is the two-time recipient of the Costa Rican National Ombudsman's award for contributing to bettering the lives of victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

EMBASSY POC

¶21. (U) Embassy San Jose's contact until April 8 is PolOff Cheryl Neely; phone: 506-2519-2256; email: NeelyCL@state.gov. After April 8, 2009, Embassy contact is Tyler Sparks, same phone, SparksTK@state.gov.

CIANCHETTE